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Atari Online News, Etc.
A-ONE Online Magazine
Dana P. Jacobson, Publisher/Managing Editor
Joseph Mirando, Managing Editor
Rob Mahlert, Associate Editor

Atari Online News, Etc. Staff

Dana P. Jacobson -- Editor
Joe Mirando -- "People Are Talking"
Michael Burkley -- "Unabashed Atariophile"
Albert Dayes -- "CC: Classic Chips"
Rob Mahlert -- Web site
Thomas J. Andrews -- "Keeper of the Flame"

With Contributions by:

Fred Horvat

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~ More Facebook Changes! ~ People Are Talking! ~ New Kindle 'Fire'!
~ Poor Nations: Tap Web! ~ Galaxy Tab 7 Plus Soon ~ Flickr Gets Touch-up!
~ Firefox 7, Fast Enough? ~ Fired HP CEO's Package ~ PS Home Gets Update!

~ More Delays for PC Game ~ Another Win vs Psystar ~ Facebook Probe Sought

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-* Strapped States Crave Bigger Online Tax Bite! *-

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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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There's no joy in Mudville tonight, the Mighty Casey has struck out! It is baseball season after all, and the regular season has ended, with the post-season playoffs starting tonight. As I've mentioned many times with my boring (to some) New England weather reports, I live in the Boston area, and in New England all my life - the heart of Red Sox Nation. I'm glad that I'm not fanatical Sox fan, but I am surprised at how poorly they played this month, leading up to their blowing a 9-game lead for a playoff berth. There's really no excuse for that kind of a performance by one of the highest paid teams in baseball. And pretty much the same thing happened to this year's Braves team, so this is not an isolated occurrence, although pretty unusual!

Not only are the fans extremely frustrated, and you need to be a Red Sox fan to really understand, but the Sox manager was so frustrated with his team that he's not returning as manager next year. Hopefully he'll end up with the Chicago Cubs, my favorite team (who is constantly bringing up the rear year after year after year!).

Yeah, I know, baseball is not the be-all, end-all news in today's world, but it's a pastime that helps take one's mind off of the rest of the problems in the world today! So now I get to root for my Tigers, and watch them beat the Yankees and then move on to likely face the Rays before getting to the World Series!

Until next time

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - Playstation Home Gets Update Ahead of Relaunch!
""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""" PC Gamers Get Delays, Again!

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Playstation Home Gets Update Today Ahead of Relaunch

Playstation Home will be getting a major relaunch in the near future, but that doesn t mean they re ignoring the Playstation Network s interactive social environment until that happens.

A new update will roll out today, according to the official Playstation Blog.

The 1.55 update will apparently change up the start-up environment for Home users, improving the 'start-up flow.' There will also be a some new updates to the wardrobe and furniture browsers, as well as the ability to manually clear your Playstation Home cache.

On top of that, the new Active Camera will allow users a bit more flexibility recording and editing video of their Home excursions, and uploading the video directly to YouTube.

There s even a fancy video teasing the Active Camera possibilities.

Assassin's Creed: Revelations PC Release Delayed Until December

Once again, the PC gamers are left with the short straw. We already knew that Assassin s Creed: Revelations would be hitting stores on November 15; but now there s one less platform in the mix on launch day. The PC version of the Ubisoft-published game has been delayed, with the release now set for December 2.

The news comes from Eurogamer, which discovered the date change on Ubisoft s Czech Facebook page. No reason is given, though the site correctly notes that this is something of a trend for the publisher.

Recent Ubi releases From Dust and Driver: San Francisco both arrived late on PC. Same goes for last year s Assassin s Creed: Brotherhood, which hit PCs months after its November 2010 launch, in March 2011. We ve reached out for comment, with no word back at the time of this writing.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

US Sued Over New Internet Rules

A media and Internet advocacy group sued the federal government Wednesday over its new rules covering Internet traffic, saying they don’t protect wireless traffic from interference by phone companies.

The group Free Press filed its challenge to the Federal Communications Commission’s so-called "net neutrality" rules in federal court in Boston.

The rules were adopted in December and take effect in two months. They prohibit Internet service providers from favoring or discriminating against Internet content and services.

They give greater leeway to cellphone companies to manage data traffic because wireless systems are more easily overwhelmed. But Free Press objects to that distinction.

"There is no evidence in the record to justify this arbitrary distinction between wired and wireless Internet access," Free Press policy director Matt Wood said in a statement.

A spokesman for the FCC did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Two cellphone companies, Verizon Wireless and MetroPCS Communications Inc., sued over the new rules early this year, saying the FCC lacks the authority to regulate Internet traffic. Those lawsuits were thrown out by an appeals court that said they were filed prematurely. They could be refiled now that the rules have been published in the Federal Register.

The FCC adopted the so-called "Open Internet" rules because an earlier attempt to sanction Comcast Corp. for interfering with BitTorrent file-sharing traffic was overruled by a court. The FCC had based its action on broad net neutrality principles it first established in 2005.

"Net neutrality" has been a point of contention since then, with consumer groups and Democrats saying the power of Internet service providers needs to be curbed, while Republicans and cable and phone companies say freedom from regulation will encourage investment.

Activists Meet To Defend Internet from State Control

Internet activists accused governments of making it difficult for users of the Web, rights campaigners and private businesses to carry out their work through state attempts to seize control of the Web.

They said state officials were getting bolder in their drive to regulate the Web that has fueled Arab revolutions, enabled mass leaks of U.S. diplomatic cables and allowed online piracy to thrive.

"What we have seen in the last three years is that no longer do governments shy away from attempting to regulate Internet content," said Joy Liddicoat, project coordinator at New Zealand-based Association for Progressive Communications, which seeks to protect people’s rights on and to the Internet.

They were speaking at the Internet Governance Forum in Nairobi on Tuesday,

an annual event that brings together companies, non-profit groups, academics, engineers, government representatives and ordinary citizens.

Participants at the meeting said governments were increasingly filtering and blocking content on the Web, carrying out surveillance and making requests for data and privacy information in countries like Egypt and Pakistan.

"These are the sort of issues we would like to see discussed at the IGF and we think we need much more open and transparent discussions on how we should respond to these challenges," Liddicoat said.

They hope to show they are best placed to write the rules of the road ahead for the World Wide Web, an increasingly important driver of economic growth in a world on the brink of recession.

Maud de Boer-Buquicchio, deputy secretary general at Council of Europe, a 47-nation group that is mainly concerned about human rights, said that the growing relevance of the Web to millions of people as a tool of communication and commerce added impetus to the need for agreements on Internet governance.

"It is an important moment to come to some sort of principles that should govern the Internet at the level of those who govern the Internet," de Boer-Buquicchio said.

In a study published this year, consultancy McKinsey found the Internet accounted for 21 percent of GDP growth in mature countries, and that almost $8 trillion changes hands through e-commerce each year.

"Stronger influence of governments seems inevitable. The Internet has simply become too important for them to ignore it. They prefer a top-down approach," Markus Kummer of the Internet Society, which campaigns for the open Internet, told a recent London seminar.

Groups like the Internet Society fear the creeping use by governments of tools like "three strikes and you're out" laws to cut off Internet access from citizens caught breaking copyright rules, already passed by France and being considered in several other European countries.

Some countries have tried more radical measures, like Egypt cutting itself off from the Internet during the Arab Spring to stop flash protests being coordinated on websites like Twitter.

French President Nicolas Sarkozy, who applauded the Arab Spring, hosted the e-G8 in Paris this year, a conference of political leaders and Internet company bosses at which he put the case for more government regulation while paying lip service to an inclusive approach to governing the Internet.

"It was very exclusionary. For women and the global South there was virtually no consultation. It was a hand-picked group of white, male billionaires," Internet lawyer and consumer advocate Jeremy Malcolm told Reuters.

"The IGF is really the last best hope for this process. If it fails, what we're going to get is India, Brazil, South Africa, China, Kazakhstan, Russia and so on putting forward the idea that we need an intergovernmental process."

The Internet’s potential to raise living standards is under-exploited in the developing world where just 21 percent of the population have access, compared with 69 percent in the developed world.

Its role as a catalyst for development will be a key theme of the IGF, a United Nations-sponsored event where speakers will include World Wide Web inventor Tim Berners-Lee and EU digital agenda commissioner Neelie Kroes.

If it is to succeed in keeping governments at arm’s length, the IGF will also have to show it is serious about cybersecurity

which companies now view as a bigger threat than traditional crime, natural disasters and terrorism.

The forum comes at a time of technical upheaval for the Internet where top-level domains such as .com or .org are about to be liberalized, enabling companies and communities to buy, create, name and run their own domains.

Web addresses in languages like Arabic and Russian have also recently been made possible, a move expected to transform the Internet and give more power to non-English speakers.

"The technology continuing to change is a given that we have to accept," said Jeff Brueggeman, who runs public policy for U.S. telecoms operator AT&T and will attend the IGF. "The idea is always to be looking ahead at the next issue."

Strapped States Crave Bigger Online Tax Bite

With holiday shopping season near and billions of dollars in sales tax at stake, financially strapped state and local governments are pushing to collect more tax on online purchases, but real progress will require action in Washington where political gridlock prevails.

Recent efforts by California made headlines nationwide when Amazon.com, one of the world’s largest online retailers, agreed to begin collecting taxes on sales in that state as early as next September.

The state, which faced a $25 billion budget deficit at the beginning of the year, is estimated to be losing $1.7 billion annually in uncollected online sales taxes.

Sales over the web are the fastest growing area of retailing and states are anxious to up their share. Deloitte LLP projects that this holiday season, retail sales overall will grow up 3 percent, but 14 percent online. Goldman Sachs has estimated that online shopping will jump from less than 10 percent of retail sales to over 17 percent by 2020.

Under a Supreme Court decision now almost 20 years old, any national framework for collecting tax on remote sales would have to come from Congress.

Until that happens, states can only seek sales taxes from companies with a physical operation in their state, leaving many sales to fall through the cracks. Amazon has facilities in California and other states which have pushed the online retailer to collect taxes on sales shipped to their residents.

"We need help at the national level," says Mick Cornett, mayor of Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. He has lobbied extensively for federal action. "There's a limit to what we can do."

Proponents of federal action say the current situation is unfair to local merchants who must collect sales tax.

But it's another side of the issue - the revenue loss to states and cities in uncollected taxes - that has fueled action on the state level. Besides California, the states of New York, Texas, Illinois and others have recently approved laws aimed at collecting more sales tax on ecommerce.

Progress on the issue has been slow in Washington, where anything with even a whiff of tax increase struggles. A bill introduced in late July by Democratic Senator Dick Durbin had five co-sponsors, none Republican. Bipartisan support will be necessary for even a chance of passage.

On the state level, though, financial pressures seem to have erased partisan division on the issue. Texas' majority Republican legislature passed its legislation, and California's measure had support from both parties.

Hoping to bring that cooperation and a sense of urgency on the issue to Washington, local businesspeople, mayors and other officials from states have been lobbying on Capitol Hill.

Danny Diaz, spokesman for the Alliance for Main Street Fairness, which has been pushing for a federal structure, estimates that between 150 and 200 members of Congress come from states which have recently taken action and would see hometown support for a federal solution.

Oklahoma City's Mayor Cornett, a Republican, has lobbied lawmakers on the issue and raised it in a meeting with President Barack Obama.

Cornett says the $10 to $15 million a year his city loses on uncollected taxes equates to between 100 and 150 firefighters or police. He says he's making progress arguing that these are taxes already owed, not new taxes.

"Now you find conservatives in Washington who understand this is closing a loophole, it's not a new tax," says Cornett.

"Most cities are just hanging on, trying to keep the firefighters and police on the street. This is one way Congress can help local governments without it costing them anything."

Nationally, the cost of running local government is rising faster than tax revenue. Sinking property values are hurting real estate tax collections. Stagnant salaries have kept income tax flat in the states which impose one.

Oklahoma's cities rely on sales taxes for 55 percent of their budget on average. In some places, sales tax covers more than 90 percent of the local budget.

Arkansas municipalities rely on it heavily too, for close to 50 percent of their income from sales taxes. Slack receipts have driven 15 Arkansas cities to institute sales tax increases so far this year, according to the Arkansas Municipal League.

Texas Comptroller Susan Combs calculates that in fiscal 2010, which ended

August 31, her state lost $658 million in uncollected sales taxes. Sales tax contributes 55 percent of the state’s total income.

Poor Nations Urged To Tap Web Fast for Growth

With online business increasingly driving economic growth, developing nations’ top priority should be the infrastructure their citizens need to get connected, delegates at an Internet conference in Nairobi said this week.

The Internet’s potential to raise living standards is under-exploited in the developing world, where just 21 percent of the population have access, compared with 69 percent in the developed world.

In a study published earlier this year, consultancy Mckinsey found that the Internet accounted for 21 percent of economic growth in mature economies, and that almost $8 trillion changes hands through e-commerce each year.

But regions such as Africa, lacking the broadband infrastructure mature economies enjoy, have an uphill struggle to encourage telecoms operators to invest in the mobile networks needed to bring the Internet to the masses - especially when the masses have little disposable income to repay their investment.

"There is no way developing countries should sit back and wait, because online activities are driving offline activities," said Joe Mucheru, head of Google in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Participants at the United Nations-sponsored Internet Governance Forum said there was a need to expand infrastructure such as undersea cables and wireless networks for markets where the primary mode of connection to the Web is by mobile phone.

Increased bandwidth capacity and increased competition will cut prices and allow more people to get connected, government officials and company executives attending the forum said.

Some Western telecoms operators facing stagnation at home are prepared to make big bets on connecting developing nations; France Telecom, under the brand name Orange, is seeking to double its revenue in the Middle East and Africa to 7 billion euros ($9.5 billion) in the coming years.

It is already present in Egypt, Tunisia, Senegal and Kenya, among other African countries. One of its present projects is the building of an undersea cable to improve Internet connectivity in west Africa.

"We’ve prioritized spending on the undersea cables, since that will really be a vast improvement to what is currently available," said Thierry Bonhomme, head of networks at France Telecom.

Today, much of Africa’s Internet traffic is delivered via satellites, which have far less capacity and connectivity than the intercontinental cables that are slowly being built.

In Nigeria, it costs $1,100 to buy capacity per megabyte on the Lagos to Abuja link - nearly double the $600 it costs to buy the same capacity on the much longer Lagos to London link, due to the lack of internal

infrastructure once the signal reaches Africa.

Executives of cable operators there have been lobbying the government to formulate forward-looking policies that can help cut the costs of moving capacity within the country.

Bitange Ndemo, the top official at Kenya’s ministry of communication, says the answer lies in the construction of a national fiber network to take capacity brought on submarine cables to homes and businesses.

"I ask you to make (access) to this resource (high-speed Internet) a human rights issue," Ndemo told participants at the meeting.

"If access to broadband is declared a human rights issue, then governments will step in and invest so no human being is left behind."

The east African nation, whose approach to provision of communication infrastructure and industry-friendly regulations was promoted by delegates to the conference as a viable model for other developing nations, is in the process of putting up a next-generation LTE network - more advanced than most developed economies can boast - to be run by several firms.

The mobile phone is the primary tool of access to the Internet in Africa, driving some handset makers such as Nokia to incorporate Web functions into their latest low-priced models aimed at the continent.

In light of that, Robert Pepper, vice president for global technology policy at Cisco Systems, said African nations could increase access to the Web by switching off analog television in favor of digital TV and using the spectrum used by TV stations for wireless Internet networks.

Nations that impose steep taxes and levies on landing rights for firms that are building submarine cables connecting the continent with the outside world will miss out as the cable operators bypass such nations, delegates to the forum warned.

"Traditionally, international telecom firms were seen as a source of foreign investment and international currencies. Now, if governments have high fees and taxes for cable landings, operators will just by-pass those countries," said Cisco’s Pepper.

Recently Fired HP CEO Departs with More Than $13 Million

Recently fired Hewlett-Packard CEO Leo Apotheker is walking away with more than $13 million in cash and stock as shareholders stew over a rocky reign that saw the technology company’s market value plunge by nearly $40 billion in just 11 months.

The parting package spelled out Thursday in a regulatory filing wasn’t surprising. Most major companies guarantee generous payments to ousted executives as long as they aren’t dumped for unethical or criminal conduct.

Nevertheless, the details of Apotheker’s jackpot probably won’t soothe the hard feelings still lingering over Hewlett-Packard Co.’s decision to hire him in the first place.

Apotheker replaced Mark Hurd, who was ushered out in August 2010 in a scandal triggered by unproven allegations of sexual harassment. Hurd's severance included a $12.2 million cash payment and $30 million worth of stock that he got by exercising options after his resignation. HP's stock price more than doubled during Hurd's five-year stint as CEO, adding about $50 billion to the company's market value.

HP's shares fell by 46 percent during Apotheker's tenure, which ended Sept. 22. The shares closed Thursday at $23.78.

Despite the missteps that got him fired, Apotheker still will get a $2.4 million bonus later this year under HP's "pay-for-results" plan, according to a company filing Thursday with the Securities and Exchange Commission. Apotheker also will receive $7.2 million in severance payments over the next 18 months and the vesting rights to 156,000 shares of restricted stock currently worth about $3.7 million.

The value of Apotheker's other stock awards will depend on how the company fares in the next few years. Apotheker, who moved from Europe to work at HP's Palo Calif. headquarters, apparently will be watching how the company does without him from abroad. HP also is paying his relocation expenses to France or Belgium, and will cover up to $300,000 on any loss that he suffers from the sale of his California home.

The second guessing about Apotheker began almost as soon as HP announced his hiring a year ago because his previous employer, business software maker SAP, had dumped him as CEO.

The initial befuddlement quickly turned into outrage as HP repeatedly missed its financial targets under Apotheker. Things reached a boiling point last month after Apotheker announced HP's plan to kill a computer tablet in its infancy, spend $10 billion to buy business software maker Autonomy and consider selling or spinning off its personal computer division.

HP is resting its turnaround hopes on Apotheker's successor, former eBay Inc. CEO and unsuccessful California gubernatorial candidate, Meg Whitman. HP set Whitman's salary at $1 annually, but she could earn a bonus of up to $6 million, according to the company's SEC filing.

Whitman can afford a small salary because she became a billionaire during her time at eBay. She is worth about $1.3 billion, according to Forbes magazine's latest rankings. Several other of Silicon Valley's current and past billionaire CEOs, including Google Inc.'s Larry Page and Apple Inc.'s Steve Jobs, have insisted on capping their salaries at $1.

HP also will grant Whitman 1.9 million stock options. The exercise price of those options will be set on the day they are issued to her. The value of those options will hinge how much HP's stock price rises, or falls, during her tenure.

The company also granted 1 million stock options to its executive chairman, Ray Lane, who joined HP's board when Apotheker was hired. Lane is taking on more active role in steering HP now that Apotheker is gone.

Firefox 7 Is Faster, But Not Fast Enough for Reviewers

Just six weeks after coming out with Firefox 6, Mozilla has released Firefox 7. When Firefox released its last version, it didn't seem all too fast or worth the switch for Chrome, Internet Explorer or Safari lovers, as we reported. But it looks like Firefox has addressed its main issue: speed. Of course, if 7 doesn't quite work for you, Firefox is on a rapid release schedule, and plans on putting out 8 in another six weeks, giving it just enough time to tweak any issues with seven.

Firefox 6 claimed a 20 percent increase in speed, but as we reported, it didn't exactly work that much quicker than IE9 or Chrome. Firefox 7 seems to address its slowness issues. Specifically, it reduced memory usage, making it run faster, reports 9to5Mac's Christian Zibreg. "Well, according to Mozilla, a non-profit organization behind Firefox, a MemShrink project used in the browser reduces memory use by 20 to 50 percent. As a result, the browser boots faster, your Mac will have more free RAM when skimming through dozens of web sites in Firefox 7 and there s a lower likelihood of crashing." Also in the speed department, Firefox now runs quicker on sites that use HTML5, explains Endgadget's Donald Melanson, thanks to a "new version of the hardware-accelerated Canvas."

Not only does the browser promise to run faster, it should have an accelerated start up time, explains PCMag's Michael Muchmore.

"Firefox has taken longer to start running than any competing browser for years. It's particularly a problem for a cold start: when you first run the app after a reboot. In a quick comparison test between Firefox 6 and 7, I found that there was indeed an improvement: The older version took 8 seconds to start, while version 7 improved that to 5 seconds."

But still not quite as fast as its predecessors, continues Michael Muchmore. "This still, however, lagged behind Internet Explorer 9's 2.5 seconds and Chrome 13's 4.2 seconds on my 2.6GHz Core 2 Duo with 3GB of RAM."

Another notable addition to 7 is the opt-in reporting tool: Telemetry. "Telemetry, or usage statistics to you and me, is a new Firefox 7 feature that allows the browser to report back to Mozilla HQ on how Firefox works for you on your system.which will allow users to send Mozilla complaints about the browser," explains ZDNet's Adrian Kingsley-Hughes. With the quick release update schedule, Firefox can address those concerns with its next iteration in no-time.

Amazon Ignites Tablet War With Fire, Takes on Apple

Amazon.com Inc took the wraps off its long-awaited "Kindle Fire" on Wednesday, tacking on a mass market-friendly $199 price tag that poses a serious threat to the dominance of Apple Inc's two-year-old iPad.

The eagerly anticipated gadget, while lacking many of the high-tech bells and whistles common on tablets from cameras to 3G wireless connection, may sound the death knell for a raft of devices based on Google Inc's Android. The software powers tablets made by Samsung, Motorola, Asustek, HTC and LG Electronics.

Dotcom-entrepreneur and billionaire-CEO Jeff Bezos unveiled to a packed audience the gadget he hopes will wed Amazon's books, movies, music and other content with cloud or Internet-based storage and Web browsing.

"People have been waiting for a tablet for 200 bucks for a long time and this is the best one I've seen so far," Tim Stevens, editor-in-chief of gadget review website Engadget, told Reuters.

The Kindle Fire tablet has a 7-inch screen, free data storage over the Internet and a new browser called Amazon Silk. Amazon expects shipments to start on November 15 - hitting store shelves at Best Buy and other chains just in time for the peak holiday shopping season.

By pricing the Fire at less than half the iPad - yet stripping out costlier components and features - the Internet retailer hopes to get the device into millions of consumers' hands, who in turn will buy Amazon content.

One key differentiator that might help the Fire stand out during the cut-throat holidays is Amazon's "EC2" cloud computing service, which supports Internet browsing and helps speed loading of websites. That was not available on rival tablets, Stevens noted.

"Expect a blood bath as pricing will have to get extremely aggressive," said Mark Gerber, an analyst at Detwiler Fenton & Co. He expects Amazon to sell at least 3 million Kindle Fires this holiday season, taking the No. 2 spot in the tablet market.

The Fire was unveiled alongside several rock-bottom-priced versions of the basic Kindle reader, with the lowest at $79 - a clear challenge to Barnes & Noble Inc's Nook that will surely force the ailing bookstore chain to try and match.

Amazon shares closed 2.5 percent higher, while Barnes & Noble dropped 7 percent. Apple shares dipped 0.6 percent.

"These are premium products at non-premium prices," Chief Executive Jeff Bezos said. "We are going to sell millions of these."

Analysts had expected Amazon's tablet to be priced around $250, roughly half the price of Apple's dominant iPad, which starts at $499. The Nook Color e-reader costs $249.

The Web retailer might be angling for a lower-end slice of the market that Apple - which maintains a careful grip over its higher-end branding and margins - has traditionally steered clear of.

Bezos said Amazon is making "millions" of the tablet, without being more specific. However, he urged customers to pre-order the device.

When the original Kindle e-reader came out in 2007, it quickly sold out.

Colin Sebastian, an analyst at RW Baird, kept his Amazon tablet sales forecasts the same on Wednesday on concern about potential supply issues. He expects two million to three million units to be sold this year and four to six million next year.

"While we think the Kindle Fire could easily be the most successful Android-based tablet to date, the November 15 launch date, and the possibility of issues with ramping production - Apple encountered significant production issues with the iPad 2 - are the key reasons we are maintaining our current tablet estimates."

Breaking into a crowded tablet market will be difficult. Companies from

Hewlett Packard Co, Motorola, Samsung and Research in Motion Ltd have launched tablets, but none has taken a big bite out of Apple’s lead.

Apple dominates the North American tablet market, with 80 percent of the 7.5 million units shipped during the second quarter of 2011, according to Strategy Analytics.

Bezos took a jab at its larger rival during the New York press conference on Wednesday, noting that the Fire needs no wires for syncing. An image of a white USB cord appeared on the screen behind him, prompting laughter from the crowd.

Bezos didn’t mention Apple but the picture of the cord resembled those commonly used to connect iPhones and iPads to computers.

Still, Michael Yoshikami, who oversees $1 billion at YCMNET Advisors, discounted any serious hit to Apple - for now - because of Apple’s similarly rich library of content.

But he thought Apple may need to start offering some sort of subscription-based video streaming service - iTunes is download primarily - to respond. Rivals without their own content or services to support their devices, such as Samsung, are most exposed, he added.

"HP’s decision to get out of tablets is actually looking fairly bright," he told Reuters.

Having its own tablet is important for Amazon because the company has amassed a mountain of digital goods and services that could be sold through such a device.

The tablet might also encourage customers of Amazon, the world’s largest Internet retailer, to shop online for physical products more often.

Amazon recently redesigned its main shopping website to make it easier to navigate for mobile users.

"Getting this device into the hands of customers means Amazon can expand their e-commerce footprint - this is a strategic focus for the company," said Eric Best, an Amazon veteran who now runs online commerce company Mercent.

"Every Kindle Fire user, by virtue of the better browser and richer operating system, has the potential to become a more frequent Amazon shopper."

Meanwhile, competition at the high end of the market is heating up. Motorola on Wednesday announced it will offer 4G-LTE upgrades for Motorola Xoom users on Verizon Wireless, improving loading speeds.

Samsung Unveils Upgraded Galaxy Tab 7 Plus

Samsung Mobile on Friday unveiled an upgraded 7-inch tablet in its product line. The company said the new Galaxy Tab 7 Plus will be introduced in Australia and Indonesia at the end of October, and gradually roll out to other markets thereafter.

The Galaxy Tab 7 Plus improves upon Samsung's original 7-inch model in several respects. For example, the new device will use Google's tablet-friendly Honeycomb release of Android 3.2, as opposed to the Android 2.2 platform for smartphones offered on Samsung's original 7-inch tablet.

Samsung has also replaced the dual-core 1 GHz Hummingbird processor in the original 7-inch model with a slightly faster 1.2 GHz dual-core chip. And the resolution of the front-facing camera has been upgraded from 1.3 megapixels to 2 megapixels, though the back-facing camera remains at 3 megapixels.

The new Galaxy Tab 7 Plus also sports TouchWiz, Samsung's full touch user interface for mobile devices. TouchWiz interacts with the device's built in accelerometer and gyroscope to detect motions in order to enable new panning and tilt features.

The display resolution of the new Galaxy Tab 7 Plus remains at 600x1024 pixels, and the buyer's memory options are unchanged at either 16GB or 32GB of storage. However, the Galaxy Tab 7 Plus does offer support for high-speed packet access plus (HSPA+), which means AT&T and T-Mobile will be able to seamlessly integrate the new device on their compatible networks.

The arrival of the Galaxy Tab 7 Plus on the heels of Amazon's Kindle Fire this week appears to be more than a coincidence. Like Toshiba with its rollout of the new 7-inch Thrive on Wednesday, Samsung appears to be making an effort to inform consumers that Kindle Fire alternatives are coming.

Samsung has not yet given a suggested retail price for the new Galaxy Tab 7 Plus. With the $199 to $499 price range having now been set by Amazon's Kindle Fire and Apple's iPad 2, however, Samsung will need to ensure that its new 7-inch model can be priced by wireless carriers and distributors somewhere in the middle.

Analysts expect consumer demand for Amazon's new tablet to have a significant effect on the shipment figures of rival Android tablet vendors. According to Gartner, Android-based tablet vendors are expected to collectively account for a 17.3 percent global market share - dramatically down from the 28 percent estimate that the firm's analysts had projected earlier this year.

"The reduction would have been greater had it not been for the success of lower-end tablets in Asia, and the expectations around the launch of Amazon's tablet," Gartner's analysts said.

The premiere of Samsung's Galaxy Tab 7 Plus in Asia and Australia instead of North America or Europe may be an acknowledgment of the rough road ahead for the mobile device maker in developed markets during this year's holiday shopping season. Longer term, however, there is one way that Samsung may be able to rekindle American consumer interest in its Galaxy Tab product portfolio.

On Oct. 11, Samsung and Google also will be hosting a news conference at the CTIA wireless industry convention in San Diego, during which the two companies are slated to discuss "what's new from Android." The phrase suggests that Google's Android 4.0 platform, code-named Ice Cream Sandwich, may be introduced at the event.

"Google will address the fragmentation of Android across smartphone and

tablet form factors within the next Android release," said Gartner Research Vice President Carolina Milanesi. "Android can count on strong support from key OEMs, has a sizable developer community, and its smartphones application ecosystem is second only to Apple’s."

Apple Wins Key Battle Against Psystar Over Mac Clones

The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit has sided with Apple in the company’s bitter lawsuit against Psystar.

Circuit Judge Mary Schroeder ruled yesterday that Psystar’s Mac clones violated copyrights Apple holds, and the ban on sales will be upheld. According to Schroeder, Psystar specifically violated copyrights Apple holds in Mac OS X, and said that the U.S. District Court’s ruling in favor of Apple was just.

Psystar first started selling its Mac clones in April 2008 under the name "OpenMac" after buying copies of Mac OS X on the market and then installing them on its own brand of computers. Soon after, the company changed the name of its devices to "Open Computer."

Even so, Apple filed a copyright infringement suit against the small PC maker in July of that year. Apple argued in its lawsuit that Psystar’s clones violated its Mac OS X software licensing agreement and committed "direct and contributory copyright infringement, trademark and trade dress infringement, and violation of state and common law unfair competition laws." Apple also argued that Psystar violated the Digital Millennium Copyright Act.

Although it seemed that Psystar, a small company, would be unable to fight back against the Apple juggernaut, Psystar responded to Apple’s lawsuit, arguing in court that the Mac maker was misusing its Mac OS X copyright by requiring customers to only run the software on its own brand of computers.

After a protracted court battle, a U.S. District Court ruled in Apple’s favor in 2009, saying that Psystar "violated Apple’s exclusive reproduction right, distribution right, and right to create derivative works." The court also said that "Psystar has violated the DMCA by circumventing Apple’s protection barrier and trafficking devices designed for circumvention."

In December 2009, Apple was awarded a permanent injunction against Psystar by the district court.

Today’s ruling by Schroeder upholds the earlier ruling, and could prove to be the final nail in Psystar’s coffin.

However, Psystar did get one parting shot in. Although Apple requested the circuit court seal all of its records related to the case, Schroeder said that there is no reason to do so.

Profound Change for Facebook Set To ’Lock In’ Users

Facebook on Friday begins rolling out its biggest ever shake-up, in a move

observers say will not only profoundly alter how its 800 million users interact with the site, but will keep them coming back for decades to come.

The new "Timeline," revealed last week by chief executive Mark Zuckerberg will also likely shock some users, notorious for backlashes in recent years over even small adjustments to the site, let alone a complete re-think of how their lives are presented to the world.

The changes amount to the "heart of your Facebook experience, completely rethought from the ground up," Zuckerberg told an annual developers conference.

Rick Marini, CEO of the Facebook-focused "career network" BranchOut, which itself boasts millions of users, marveled this week in a conference call with marketers and reporters how the site had managed to build an enduring model.

"If your Timeline becomes an important part of your life - the diary of your life - Facebook may have just locked people in for the next 20 years," Marini said Wednesday.

If Facebook is "where all of this happens, all your pictures, all your video, everything you've ever done," he added: "you're never going to leave."

Zuckerberg said his team's main aim was "to design a place that feels like your home," prompting Forrester analyst Sean Corcoran to note that Facebook was "positioning itself as not just your social graph online, but your life online."

Pete Cashmore, founder of influential tech blog Mashable, this week anticipated the expected response from users in an article for CNN.com under the blunt headline, "You'll freak when you see the new Facebook."

The move, Cashmore said, would be likely jarring at first for millions of people who visit the site every day.

But when they see their lives laid out before them in a neat, single page, they will realize Facebook has "unleashed something so remarkable that you didn't even recognize it at first: A meaningful social network," he wrote.

Observers saw a clear challenge to ubiquitous search giant Google, as 27-year-old Zuckerberg explained that the site he launched from his Harvard dormitory room in 2004 sought to be a central hub for the Internet.

The overhauled "Timeline" profile pages, as users will see as it opens up to the world Friday, with access further expanded in coming weeks, shows that the social network behemoth has saved everything that's ever been uploaded.

Mapping people's lives - through photos, videos, status updates, comments, and even "likes" of specific content - the new Facebook catalogues it all, literally from the beginning: scrolling to the bottom, every user's Timeline kicks off with an entry for their birth.

"Timeline is the story of your life," the young CEO announced last week with a barely contained sense of glee.

Yet apart from a relatively small number of industry geeks who followed the Zuckerberg announcement last week, the vast majority of 800 million users

have little idea of the extent of the changes afoot the next time they log on.

Privacy Advocates Seek FTC Probe of Facebook Changes

Privacy advocates believe Facebook may have gone too far with some of the new features introduced with its redesign, and called on the Federal Trade Commission to investigate how Facebook was using identifying data.

Concerns arose when Facebook unveiled Timeline at Facebook's F8 developer conference Sept. 22. Timeline is wider than current profiles, and more visual. Essentially, Timeline lets you tell your own life story. Facebook even lets you go back into your private activity log and pull out historical archives from your old posts.

Along with Timeline, Facebook is encouraging developers to create social apps that show what users are doing on the web on their Timeline, regardless of whether the activity is on Facebook or on another site. In order to make that happen, Facebook is allowing third-party apps to be fully integrated into users' profiles and will share information automatically on your profile.

Accusations are flying that Facebook is using cookies - identifying bits of data set by websites into browsers to track users - even if the users are logged off of Facebook.

Reps. Edward J. Markey, D-Mass., and Joe Barton, R-Texas, who chair the bipartisan Congressional Privacy Caucus, wrote a letter to the Federal Trade Commission suggesting Facebook should be investigated for how it uses cookies. The congressmen used words like "unfair and deceptive acts."

"When people log out of Facebook, they are under the expectation that Facebook is no longer monitoring their activities," the congressmen wrote. "We believe this impression should be the reality."

The congressmen are not alone. The Electronic Privacy Information Center and 10 other privacy and civil-rights advocacy groups, which include the American Civil Liberties Union, Consumer Action, American Library Association and the Center for Digital Democracy, have asked the FTC to investigate Facebook.

Facebook is not admitting to doing anything wrong. In a statement issued to the BBC, Facebook insisted there was no security or privacy breach - Facebook did not store or use any information it should not have.

"Like every site on the Internet that personalizes content and tries to provide a secure experience for users, we place cookies on the computer of the user," Facebook said. 'Three of these cookies on some users' computers inadvertently included unique identifiers when the user had logged out of Facebook. However, we did not store these identifiers for logged out users. Therefore, we could not have used this information for tracking or any other purpose."

Facebook also said it fixed the cookies so that they won't include unique information in the future when people log out.

Is that enough to prevent an FTC investigation? The FTC has not commented

on whether it will launch a formal probe.

"Facebook has always aggressively pushed the boundaries of privacy and now the chorus of complaints is loud enough to get Congress and the FTC potentially involved," said Greg Sterling, principal analyst at Sterling Market Intelligence. "However, the discussion should be seen in the larger context of behavioral targeting and tracking and general online privacy discussion."

Ultimately, Sterling believes, Facebook's ability to track and convey user data to third parties will be constrained, and more disclosures will be required.

"There are a number of privacy bills circulating in Congress and I suspect we'll see some online-privacy legislation ultimately," Sterling said. "In Europe, the privacy rules and culture of privacy are much more strict, and the European Commission may be more decisive in taking action against Facebook."

Yahoo Touches Up Flickr Amid Internal Turmoil

It isn't a pretty picture at Yahoo Inc. right now, but that's not stopping the beleaguered Internet company from touching up its popular photo-sharing service, Flickr.

Yahoo made that clear Wednesday with the introduction of a new way for friends in different locations to simultaneously browse through pictures. The company also unveiled its first official application for the millions of devices running on Google Inc.'s Android software.

It's part of a broader effort by Yahoo to recapture some of the ground that it has lost in recent years to Facebook, which has emerged as an advertising and photo-sharing hub. Yahoo touted its free Android app as a sign of its determination to become a bigger force on mobile phones and tablets.

Yahoo's product managers are making the push at a time of internal turmoil.

The company, which is based in Sunnyvale, California, is trying to figure out whether it makes sense to sell part or all of its business after firing tough-talking Carol Bartz as CEO earlier this month. Employees were told the process could take several months in an e-mail last week from Yahoo Chairman Roy Bostock and co-founders Jerry Yang and David Filo. In the meantime, Chief Financial Officer Tim Morse is also filling in as interim CEO.

"Our mission is to speed innovation, to bring great new products to the market," Steve Douty, Yahoo's vice president of applications management told reporters Wednesday. "That is not going to change. We are moving ahead full steam just like we have before."

Flickr's newest sharing tool, called "Photo Session," is designed to replicate the experience of leafing through an old-fashioned photo album, even if the people who are browsing are located thousands of miles apart. Any of Flickr's nearly 170 million users can activate a session by obtaining a special link that can be sent to other invitees. A photo session can be done on iPhones, iPads and personal computers using the Safari, Firefox and Chrome browsers. The feature doesn't currently work on Internet Explorer or Opera browsers.

Photo Session also doesn’t work on the new Android app, but Yahoo plans to address that shortcoming in future updates.

Until now, the millions of people with Android devices had to rely on apps designed by non-Yahoo programmers. Douty cited the Android app as just one of several that Yahoo will be releasing in the next few months to expand its reach beyond the 137 million mobile devices that currently use some of its services.

In doing so, Yahoo hopes to revive its revenue growth after several years of erosion that have contrasted with steady growth at Google and Facebook. Yahoo’s financial funk has depressed its stock price and ushered out three CEOs in less than five years - Bartz, Yang and Terry Semel.

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